

Resources Available in Synod for Ministering to Veterans

by Amy Blumenshine, *Coming Home Collaborative*

The troubled behavior of our military veterans in the aftermath of their war experiences is in the news and triggering helpful action locally. Staggering recent news underscores the need addressed in the Minneapolis Area Synod resolution for churches to develop resources to help returning veterans and their families.

The Pentagon reported that more active duty troops killed themselves than were killed by enemy action in January, 2009. It is too soon to know how many more active duty military troops attempted suicide or how many non-active duty (veterans) committed acts of self-destruction in that period.

On the Minnesota Public Radio show *Midmorning*, on February 17, experts were interviewed regarding these troubling statistics. Among them was Mark Benjamin whose series about returning veterans, "Coming Home," can be accessed on the Web (see online resources listed at the end of article).

A local mother called in to explain how the family tried for three years to get their son properly diagnosed and treated after his first deployment. "He was so cruel to his children and destroyed his marriage." Finally, the family found a military (JAG) lawyer to intervene, and their son was diagnosed three weeks before he was due for re-deployment. According to the mother, the military said that it would wait to treat him until after he returned from his deployment. Her son is serving his deployment in South-west Asia now.

Suicide is not just a mental health issue. Missing from the nation's commentary on soldier suicides is an awareness of moral and spiritual injury experienced in war. Sadly, suicides and homicides by military service people are but the tip of the iceberg in how our they are being impacted by what we have sent them to do. We need to ask what it is that is disturbing our troops and triggering their destructive behavior. Viewing this complicated response as only a psychiatric disorder misses addressing the real needs.

Among the responses of the church is a return to some of the healing traditions of the past. A Good Friday Way of the Cross service addressing the suffering of military veterans and their families is being planned for our area. Contact ListenToVets@comcast.net for more information on this event and to get on the Veterans Ministry electronic mailing list.

People engaged in pastoral care with veterans share resources every other month at a roundtable lunch on the second Tuesday. The next one is March 10, noon to 1:30 p.m. at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, 2315 Chicago Ave. S., Minneapolis. RSVP to ListenToVets@comcast.net.



Online resources mentioned in this article:

- Minnesota Public Radio show *Midmorning*: minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2009/02/17/midmorning1
- A series of stories called "Coming Home" by Mark Benjamin: www.salon.com/news/special/coming_home/2009/02/09/coming_home_intro/
- Humphrey Institute's Warrior to Citizen (W2C) initiative interviews: www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/cdc/warrior_to_citizen_campaign/exhibit.html
- American Veterans and Service members Survival Guide: www.veteransforamerica.org/survival-guide

"Help our vets come all the way home" is the intent of an ecumenical group that is planning local weekend retreats for veterans using techniques developed in South Africa. The veterans who participate in the retreat will use a number of modalities that have helped others deal with troubling memories.

Leading the first retreat next fall will be Rev. Michael Lapsley, an Episcopalian, of the Institute for the Healing of Memories, from Capetown, South Africa. His institute has been successful with survivors of apartheid and others who have experienced violence in South Africa and other countries. In 1990, Lapsley lost both hands and an eye as a result of a letter bomb sent to his home during his involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. He worked with South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation

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Unger. For more information about registration, contact ALOA at 1-800-930-2562. For information about Heartwood, phone Paul Olson at 612-844-6803.

2009 Minneapolis Area Synod Assembly: "God's Work. Our Hands," May 29-30, Augsburg College, Minneapolis. Theme: God's Work. Our Hands. Keynote speaker: Rev. Dr. Rolf Jacobson, assistant professor of Old Testament, Luther Seminary. Bible study leader: Bishop Craig Johnson. Churchwide representative: Rev. Dr. Wyvetta Bullock. See insert for more information.

JUNE 2009

15th Biennial Ecumenical Conference for Church Office Staff, June 15-17, Concordia College, Moorhead. Designed for anyone who works in a church office, this event will deliver timely, up-to-date information on a variety of topics intended to help you learn and grow, affirm and re-energize. Registration: \$295. Contact knappraa@cord.edu or 218-299-3566 or go to www.charisecumenical.org.

Laughter, Marriage and the Healthy Church, June 30, July 2, Heartwood Conference Center & Retreat, N10884 Hoinville Road, Trego, Wis. In cooperation with the Foundation for a Great Marriage, this three-day event for Lutheran pastors and their spouses is intended to encourage clergy couples in their own marriages and also teach them to be intentional about family and marriage ministry in their own congregations. The event combines training along with current research and best practices in the nationwide healthy marriage movement along with material and presentations from the popular "Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage" seminar by the Rev. Mark Gungor of Green Bay,

Wis. To register, call Paul Olson at 612-844-6803 or e-mail paul.olson@thrivent.com.

Conference Assemblies

Central:

Sunday, March 15, 3:00 p.m.
University Lutheran Church of Hope
Dean: Mary Halvorson
612-331-8125
Staff contact: David Wangaard

Crosstown:

Thursday, March 26, 7:00 p.m.
Calvary Lutheran Church, Edina
Dean: Thomas Zarth
612-869-4917
Staff contact: Heather Hammond

North Minneapolis:

Monday, March 23, 6:00 p.m.
Location to be determined
Dean: Melissa Pohlman
612-521-3493
Staff contact: David Wangaard

Northwest:

Sunday, March 15, 2:00 p.m.
Word of Peace Lutheran Church,
Rogers
Dean: Becky Sogge, 763-682-1245
Staff contact: Glenndy Ose

Northwest Hennepin:

Sunday, March 15, 3:00 p.m.
Holy Nativity Evangelical Lutheran
Church, New Hope
Dean: Durk Peterson, 763-420-7930
Staff contact: Glenndy Ose

South Minneapolis:

Thursday, March 12, 7:00 p.m.
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran
Church, Minneapolis
Dean: Mary Albing, 612-926-5414
Staff contact: David Wangaard

394 Corridor North:

Sunday, March 8, 4:00 p.m.
Peace Lutheran Church, Plymouth
Dean: Donna Rohrer, 763-477-6300
Staff contact: Heather Hammond

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Commission, and later founded the Institute for the Healing of Memories.

The work emphasizes a spiritual, rather than an intellectual understanding of one's experiences with war and violence. Through an exploration of personal experiences – essentially supported story-telling – participants find emotional release and, as a group, gain insight and empathy for themselves and the experiences of others. After these first steps, the important work of forgiveness and reconciliation can begin.

The question posed to veterans is this: "Is your past hindering your present?" The workshop is open to veterans of any era who wish to recover from troubling memories or who wish to learn how to facilitate the healing of others. Financial assistance is available, and sponsors of scholarships continue to be sought. For more information contact Rev. Margaret Fell at 651-457-7809 or mdf@mm.com.

The organizing group is a subset of the Humphrey Institute's Warrior to Citizen (W2C) initiative which seeks to develop community involvement of veterans and their community institutions in the re-integration process. Most recently, W2C conducted oral histories of a number of Minnesota recent veterans as a way of bridging the gap between veterans and citizens. Excerpts from those interviews can be heard on the Web.

Another significant free resource provides important information for veterans on a variety of topics. Written by a veterans group, the Veterans for America, the 600-page "American Veterans and Service members Survival Guide" can be downloaded at www.veteransforamerica.org/survival-guide.